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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 9 June 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Huntley ..... (Saint Lucia)

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03-38884 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Special Committee decision of 10 June 2002 concerning Puerto Rico (*continued*)
(A/AC.109/2003/L.3 and L.7)

Hearing of petitioners

2. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Colón Martínez (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

3. **Mr. Colón Martínez** (Congreso Nacional Hostosiano) said that the colonial nature of the Puerto Rican situation had been made abundantly clear in more than 20 resolutions adopted by the Special Committee, each of which had been noted by the General Assembly. However, in its intransigence and arrogance, the Government of the United States of America continued to disregard both the appeals of the General Assembly and Article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations. The United States Government had retained control over the Puerto Rican people through an active policy of fomenting divisiveness among them. Now, after 100 years of United States domination and with the solidarity of the Special Committee, the Puerto Rican people would exercise self-determination by convening a constituent assembly or some other mechanism to determine their future status. Two draft resolutions had recently been placed before the Puerto Rican House of Representatives and Senate respectively, calling for a constituent assembly, and each was supported by the three major political parties.

4. At a time of political ambiguity in Puerto Rico, greater international support and General Assembly involvement were vital. He urged the Special Committee, which had always been effective in advancing their cause, to adopt a resolution reaffirming the commitment of the United Nations to the decolonization of the island.

5. *Mr. Colón Martínez withdrew.*

6. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Calero (Political Rights Defense Fund) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

7. **Mr. Calero** (Political Rights Defense Fund) said that, over the past six months, he had been fighting the United States Government's attempts to deport him, revoke his permanent residency and deny him the right to live and work in the United States. Following a public campaign in his behalf and an immigration judge's ruling that he was "not deportable", he had been arrested by the immigration police at the Houston airport on his return from an assignment in Mexico and Cuba for the Spanish-language magazine *Perspectiva Mundial*. The Róger Calero Defense Committee had been formed in response to the threat of the immigration police to deport him to Nicaragua and had gained the support of union leaders, defenders of immigrant workers' rights and advocates of journalists' rights.

8. After his release from jail, the same defence campaign had organized a speaking tour, on which he had visited more than 20 cities in the United States and learned that tens of thousands of immigrant workers faced similar problems.

9. Just as daily factory raids by the immigration police were aimed at the exploitation of workers, Washington's colonial rule over Puerto Rico reinforced the racist discrimination promoted by employers and the Government of the United States. He deplored attempts to use the death penalty in Puerto Rico, which was barred even by the colonial constitution, and the efforts of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to frame Puerto Rican union leaders and independence fighters as well as working-class militants in the United States. Experience had shown that United States workers fighting exploitation and oppression by factory bosses and the Government were also the most sympathetic to the struggle against United States colonial rule over Puerto Rico. His own victory against the immigration police was a weapon that could help others to defend their rights. On his next tour around the country and abroad, he would be appealing for the release of all Puerto Rican political prisoners.

10. *Mr. Calero withdrew.*

11. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Koppel (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Party)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

12. **Mr. Koppel** (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers Party)) hailed the withdrawal of the United States Navy from Vieques Island as a victory over imperialism. The battle for

Vieques highlighted the continuing colonial rule over Puerto Rico by the United States, or rather by a handful of billionaire ruling families who profited from exploiting Puerto Rican labour, land and resources and were the common enemy of both the Puerto Rican people and the working class in the United States. The United States Government had repeatedly used Puerto Rico as a base for launching attacks against other countries — Granada, Yugoslavia and, most recently, Iraq. The opposition of Puerto Rican youth to the United States draft in previous wars and to the use of university campuses by the Reserve Officers Training Corp had set an example for young people in the United States. Today, the war in Iraq and the threats against the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were less a reaction to the events of 11 September 2001 than another manifestation of the same imperialism by which it had taken over Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and Guam a century earlier. The so-called war on terrorism was merely a justification for using military might around the world to salvage a declining imperialist world order.

13. The war on terrorism and homeland defence were also a pretext for United States employers to step up their assault on workers and farmers at home. The selective "registration" of immigrants from Middle Eastern and South Asian countries and mass deportations were a means of cracking down on broader working-class resistance. Some 2.7 million working-class Puerto Ricans in the United States faced systematic discrimination and had second-class status.

14. The colonial domination of Puerto Rico gave Washington a freer hand to attack the rights of working people. Five Puerto Rican patriots remained locked up in United States prisons for expressing their ideas and carrying out actions in support of Puerto Rico's independence. Of those five — Oscar López Rivera, Juan Segarra Palmer, Haydée Beltrán, Carlos Alberto Torres and Antonio Camacho Negrón — the last had been rearrested two months earlier. Some of them, jailed for almost a quarter century, were among the longest-held political prisoners in the world. Similarly, five Cuban revolutionaries were serving draconian sentences under trumped-up charges; their real "crime" had been to obtain information on counter-revolutionary groups that, operating from United States territory, launched attacks against Cuba with the full knowledge and complicity of the United States Government. Like the Cuban revolutionaries, Puerto Rican independence fighters were subjected to wiretapping and surreptitious searches of their homes. They were denied the right to a fair trial and charged with "conspiracy".

15. Under the pretext of drug control and counter-terrorism, Washington had also expanded its construction of semi-secret bases and its military intervention in Colombia, Ecuador and the triple-border area of Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. The Cuban people, however, by freely choosing the socialist path and showing that it was possible to win genuine independence from United States domination had set an example for Puerto Rico and the working people of the United States.

16. *Mr. Koppel withdrew.*

17. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rosa Pérez (Comité Pro Derechos Humanos (Puerto Rico Human Rights Committee)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

18. **Mr. Rosa Pérez** (Comité Pro Derechos Humanos (Puerto Rico Human Rights Committee)) thanked the Committee for its many resolutions which had helped lead to his release from prison in 1999. Meanwhile, the effects of over 100 years of colonization were manifested daily in the lives of the working class exploited by multinational corporations, residents of Vieques whose family members had died in Navy bombings or from cancer, and the thousands of *independentistas* who had been persecuted, incarcerated or assassinated by Puerto Rican police and the FBI. While the halt to navy bombings on Vieques Island and the release of 11 political prisoners, including himself, were clear triumphs, five persons remained in prison and some of them were not scheduled for release until 2027. Since the events of 11 September, threats to their physical and political integrity had increased under the guise of "anti-terrorism". At times, they had even been removed from the general prison population and arbitrarily placed in isolation.

19. He read out a message from Oscar López Rivera, written from the maximum-security penitentiary at Terre Haute, Indiana. In his statement, Mr. López Rivera said that, although the political discourse of President Bush gave the impression that the United States "handed out freedom and democracy left and right", it had been more than a century since the United

States empire had arrived with cannons and rifles to offer "freedom and democracy" to Puerto Ricans. For 104 years, the struggle of the Puerto Rican people to break the chains of colonialism had been met with persecution, repression, imprisonment, exile and death. In the past four years, more than 1,000 Puerto Ricans and some non-Puerto Ricans struggling to oust the United States Navy from Vieques had been imprisoned in the United States by order of the United States Court in Puerto Rico. On 1 May, thanks to a struggle that had lasted more than 60 years, the Navy had withdrawn; however, in its characteristic arrogance, the United States Government had refused to deliver the lands to the people of Vieques because it was unwilling to decontaminate the surroundings or compensate victims of the Navy's criminal and noxious activities. That meant that the struggle in Vieques was not over. The Puerto Rican people would continue to fight for their rights on Vieques, in Puerto Rico and in the Puerto Rican diaspora at any cost.

20. *Mr. Rosa Pérez withdrew.*

21. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Gabriel (Hostos Puerto Rican Club at Hunter College) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

22. **Mr. Gabriel** (Hostos Puerto Rican Club at Hunter College) said that there were currently over 3.5 million Puerto Ricans living in the United States. They were one of the poorest and most disenfranchised ethnic groups, and were often the victims of economic exploitation and social and political repression. Puerto Ricans were grossly overrepresented in the fighting units of the United States military and in the prison system.

23. The condition of Puerto Ricans in the United States was undeniably connected to the colonial relationship between the two countries. Puerto Ricans had been economically displaced for decades, and the natural resources of their homeland had been misused by the imperialist Power. The economy of the island had been structured in order to serve American corporate and government interests rather than those of its own people, and therefore many thousands of Puerto Ricans had been forced to migrate to the United States in order to find employment. However, the colonial reality of Puerto Ricans on the island was transplanted to the United States: immigrants faced racism and limited employment and educational opportunities. Health-care and school systems in Puerto Rican communities were neglected and underfunded and, as a consequence, the majority of Puerto Ricans were stuck in a cycle of poverty.

24. Puerto Ricans would continue to fight for their human rights and self-determination for as long as their oppression continued. He urged the Committee to reiterate the need for the decolonization of Puerto Rico.

25. *Mr. Gabriel withdrew.*

26. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Melé (65th Honor Task Force) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

27. **Mr. Melé** (65th Honor Task Force), noting that he represented a coalition of American soldiers favouring the decolonization of Puerto Rico, said that Puerto Rican soldiers had fought as part of the United States Army on the battlefields of Europe, Korea and Viet Nam. They had paid with life and limb for the freedom enjoyed by current generations of Americans and, most recently, had risked their lives to liberate the people of Iraq from the grip of tyranny and allow them an opportunity to exercise their right to self-determination. It was therefore all the more unjust that citizen-soldiers who served a nation with honour and courage were denied the right to cast a vote to elect their own commander-in-chief, namely the President of the United States.

28. He urged the United States Government to grant the people of Puerto Rico the right to self-determination so that they could decide for themselves how best to adapt their country to the geopolitical challenges of the new century.

29. *Mr. Melé withdrew.*

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2003/L.7

30. **Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/2003/L.7, said that, as in previous years, the draft resolution reaffirmed the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and independence in conformity with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and reiterated that those people constituted a Latin American and Caribbean nation that had its own unequivocal identity.

31. Previous resolutions had urged the Government of the United States to put an end to military manoeuvres on Vieques Island and, just a few weeks

previously, to the great satisfaction of the people of Puerto Rico and all those who participated in the wide campaign of international solidarity, the United States Marines had indeed stopped its bombings and exercises. However, the departure of the Marines from Vieques Island should be accompanied without delay by the devolution to the people of Puerto Rico of the territories previously used in military manoeuvres and still occupied by the United States Department of the Interior.

32. Over 60 years of bombing had polluted the soil, water and the beaches of Vieques Island, thereby damaging the local economy and putting the health of the population at risk. Consequently, decontaminating the island was a matter of some urgency.

33. The draft resolution reiterated the request to the President of the United States to release all Puerto Rican political prisoners serving sentences in United States prisons for cases related to the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico. It also noted that the final document of the Thirteenth Summit of the Heads of State or Government of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries also reaffirmed the right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination and requested the Special Committee to continue pursuing the issue.

34. **Mr. Blanco** (Venezuela) said that he wished to reiterate his support for the inalienable right of the people of Puerto Rico to self-determination. The draft resolution presented a balanced account of the relevant facts, and he urged the Committee to adopt it by consensus.

35. *Draft resolution A/AC.109/2003/L.7 was adopted without a vote.*

36. **Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla** (Cuba) said that draft resolution A/AC.109/2003/L.7 was the twenty-second draft resolution concerning Puerto Rico to be adopted and should be viewed as a practical tool rather than a mere formality. It should pave the way for the Puerto Rican people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

37. He expressed his appreciation to the representative of the United States for attending the meeting and reiterated that the Committee was in favour of dialogue and cooperation with all administering Powers. The resolution should serve as a valuable aid to the United States authorities, which had accepted the fact that a debate on the issue of Puerto Rico was necessary.

38. The resolution clearly stated the urgent need for the decontamination of certain areas of Vieques Island. The economic, social and health-care needs of the island's inhabitants must also be addressed. He hoped that, during the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the people of Puerto Rico would finally be able to enjoy the exercise of their right to self-determination.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.